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The Muslim Brotherhood in the United Kingdom

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Program on Extremism

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The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author, and not necessarily those of the Program on Extremism or the George Washington University.

Abstract

In April 2014 the British Prime Minister David Cameron announced a government-wide review of "the philosophy, activities, impact and influence on UK national interests, at home and abroad, of the Muslim Brotherhood and of government policy towards the organisation."[1] As part of the process, the UK Cabinet Office commissioned George Washington University's Program on Extremism's director, Dr. Lorenzo Vidino, a paper on the Muslim Brotherhood in the UK. In December 2015 the British government released an executive summary of the report. This paper is an excerpt from the longer paper submitted by Dr. Vidino to the Cabinet Office.

[1] Prime Minister's Office, "Government Review of the Muslim Brotherhood," Her Majesty's Government, 17 April 2014, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-review-of-the-muslim-brotherhood.

Executive Summary

The Muslim Brotherhood is the oldest and arguably the most influential contemporary Islamist movement. While not shunning violence as a political tool, it advocates a bottom-up, gradual Islamisation of society. Starting with the reformation of individuals, this would eventually lead to the formation of a purely Islamic society and, as a natural consequence, political entity.

The Brotherhood has a presence in some ninety countries worldwide and in each country the movement has taken different forms, adapting to the local political conditions. Brotherhood-linked entities in each country work according to a common vision but in complete operational independence, making the Brotherhood a global informal movement.

The Three Categories of the Muslim Brotherhood Operating inside the UK

Three categories of individuals and organisations operating inside the UK can be referred to as "Muslim Brotherhood." In decreasing degrees of intensity, these are the pure Brothers, Brotherhood affiliates and organisations influenced by the Brotherhood.

The Pure Brothers

These are members of various branches of the Muslim Brotherhood throughout the Middle East (Egypt, Iraq, Libya…) who over the last fifty years have established a presence in the UK. Each of these branches conducts various activities inside the UK aimed at supporting the activities of the mother organisations in their home countries, at time overtly, at times covertly (in this regard particularly significant are the fundraising efforts for Hamas, the Palestinian branch of the Brotherhood). Most recently significant attention has been devoted to the activities of members of the Egyptian branch of the Brotherhood living in London. This small cluster of a handful of senior leaders and young activists is engaged in media, legal and lobbying efforts aimed at challenging the current Egyptian regime. The London-based activists appear to be unable to generate any grassroots support inside the UK but are well connected to other Muslim Brotherhood activists worldwide.

Brotherhood Affiliates

Brotherhood affiliates are organisations established by individuals with strong personal ties to the Brotherhood but operate completely independently from any Brotherhood structure and, in most cases, transcend the national divides that characterise the first tier. Of the many organisations that fit this description, arguably the most important is the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB). Over the last few years this milieu (the informal networks of the MAB) appears to have lost significant influence for a combination of reasons:

- The departure of key leaders who took leadership positions in Brotherhood entities in their countries of origin after the beginning of the Arab Spring
- The negative reaction among significant sections of Britain's Islamist settings – particularly among second and third generations – to the departure towards the home

countries of Brotherhood leaders who had long professed to be working mainly for Islam in Britain

- Internal divisions triggered by personal rivalries and ideological fissures (on issues such as alliances with the Left or positions towards Shiism and Iran)
- The severely decreased access to government these organisations have enjoyed over the last few years.

Organisations Influenced by the Brotherhood

Organisations influenced by the Brotherhood include:

- Organisations founded by some individuals with deep ties to the Brotherhood that have since dwelled in ideological surroundings that are very close to the movement, such as the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) and Islamic Relief
- Organisations that trace their origins to the Jamaat-e-Islami, the Brotherhood's sister movement in South Asia. Some sections of this movement seem to have adopted and refined some of the entryist tactics typical of the Brotherhood, applying them to local politics (as in the case of Tower Hamlets) or education (as, apparently, in the so-called 'Trojan horse' plot in Birmingham). Yet it seems apparent that, at this stage, this milieu operates in complete independence from members of the Brotherhood.

The Goals

The goal of the 'pure Brothers', such as the Egyptians currently operating in London, is to support the activities of the mother groups in their home countries. The aims of the second layer, the long-time British-based Brothers, and the third, the Brotherhood-influenced milieus, are arguably different and can be summed up as follows:

- Spread their religious and political views to British Muslim communities
- Become official or de facto representatives of British Muslim communities in the eyes of the government and the media
- Support domestic and international Islamist causes with local Muslim communities and British policy-makers and public.

The first two layers of what has been termed as Brotherhood comprise only a few hundred activists and a relatively larger number of sympathisers; they directly control only a dozen or so mosques throughout the UK. Yet, thanks to a combination of ideological flexibility, unrelenting activism, large funding, and poor organisation of competing trends, the Brotherhood networks have in the past shown an enormous ability to exert a disproportionate influence. At the current stage though it appears that JeI-linked groups, thanks also to the demographics of British Islam, have become the most active among non-violent Islamist movements in the country.

The Muslim Brotherhood

Virtually every issue related to the Muslim Brotherhood, from how it works to who its members are, from where it stands on many issues to, ultimately, whether it poses a threat or not (and, if so, of what nature) has been debated endlessly within British policy and academic circles – without resolution. This confusion, which has often resulted in conflicting policies, is somewhat understandable, given the movement's complexity, opacity and the differences among its global spinoffs.

The first crucially important yet extremely challenging task related to any analysis on the movement's presence in any country is to define what the term 'Muslim Brotherhood' means. Arguably the term is most commonly used to refer to the organisation that Hassan al Banna founded in Egypt in 1928. Coining what would become the motto of generations of Islamists ('Islam is the solution'), al Banna viewed Islam as a complete and all-embracing system, governing all aspects of private and public life. Even though he did not shun violence as a political tool, he advocated a bottom-up, gradual Islamisation of society that, starting with the reformation of individuals, would eventually lead to the formation of a purely Islamic society and, as a natural consequence, political entity.

The organisation he created immediately attracted large support within Egypt, becoming one of the most important players in Egyptian political life over the last eight-five years. But since the 1940s the Brotherhood's message has spread to some ninety countries (virtually all Muslim-majority countries and several countries where a Muslim minority exists). In each country the movement has taken different forms, adapting to the local political conditions.

In Middle Eastern countries where it has been tolerated, like Jordan, it has existed as a social movement devoted to education and charitable activities and as a political party. In those where it has been persecuted, like Syria, it remained an underground movement, devoted to *dawa* (proselytising) and, in some cases, to violence. In the West, it took locally familiar forms, such as civil rights groups and religious and lobbying organisations.

All these entities work according to a common vision but in complete operational independence. There are consultations and constant communication, but each is free to pursue its goals as it deems appropriate. Like any movement that spans continents and has millions of members and sympathisers, the global Muslim Brotherhood is hardly a monolithic block. Personal and ideological divisions are common. Divergences emerge on how the movement should try to achieve its goals and, in some cases, even on what those goals should actually be.

Senior scholars and activists often vie with one another over theological issues, political positions, access to financial resources, and leadership of the movement. Despite these inevitable differences, their deep belief in the inherent political nature of Islam and their adoption of al Banna's organisation-focused methodology in order to implement it make them part of the informal transnational movement of the Muslim Brotherhood.

In a 2008 interview, Mohamed Habib, then first deputy chairman of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, confirmed this assessment of the organisations that locate themselves in the Brotherhood's galaxy:

> There are entities that exist in many countries all over the world. These entities have the same ideology, principle and objectives but they work in different circumstances

> and different contexts. So, it is reasonable to have decentralisation in action so that every entity works according to its circumstances and according to the problems it is facing and in their framework.[2]

The term Muslim Brotherhood, therefore, can describe both the individual entities that operate in each country but also a global informal movement in which like-minded individuals interact through an unofficial yet very sophisticated international network of personal, financial and especially ideological ties. Mohammed Akef, the former *murshid* of the Egyptian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, describes it as 'a global movement whose members cooperate with each other throughout the world, based on the same religious worldview – the spread of Islam, until it rules the world'.[3] He added: 'A person who is in the global arena and believes in the Muslim Brotherhood's path is considered part of us and we are part of him.' Other senior members of the Brotherhood have described it as a 'common way of thinking' and 'an international school of thought'.[4]

Despite this informality, an international structure does exist. In 1982 the formal International Organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood was established as 'a comprehensive Islamic body working to establish Allah's religion on earth', composed of several institutions (a General Guide, a Guidance Bureau and a Shura Council) assigned to coordinate the activities of the various branches.[5] Uniting some of the top leaders of Brotherhood branches from several countries in the Arab world – but with the Egyptians always dominating – the International Organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood aimed to craft a unified strategy for the movement, arbitrating internal conflicts and dividing funds.

The experiment largely failed. Travel bans and other security restrictions prevented members of the various branches from travelling freely and meeting regularly. Most importantly, the attempt to create a multinational organisation failed because of the reluctance of all branches to accept the leading role the Egyptians had reserved for themselves. If the Egyptians had in mind a sort of Soviet-style 'Muslim Comintern', with Cairo in place of Moscow, other branches and affiliates rejected the idea, opting for more decentralisation. Despite these difficulties the International Organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood still operates today and has in London-based Egyptian Brother Ibrahim Mounir one of its most important elements.

The Brotherhood in the UK

The different definitions of the term 'Muslim Brotherhood' (discussed in the previous chapter) frequently cause problems in identifying Brotherhood members, particularly in the West. In no Western country is having an affiliation with the Brotherhood illegal, as it is in Egypt, Syria or, most recently, Saudi Arabia. Yet it could arguably be politically damning and many individuals

[2] Interview with Mohamed Habib in *al Ahrar Daily*, as reported by the Muslim Brotherhood's official website, 16 June 2008, http://www.ikhwanweb.com/Article.asp?ID=17267&LevelID=1&SectionID=0.
[3] *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 11 December 2005.
[4] Yussuf Nada (Campione d'Italia), interview by author, July 2008; Dr. Abd El Monem Abou El Fotouh (Cairo), interview by author, December 2008.
[5] Kamal Helbawy (London), interview by author, December 2008; Israel Elad Altman, "Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement, 1928–2007," Hudson Institute, January 2009, p. 5–6.

within the Brotherhood milieu have often vigorously challenged being identified as 'members of the Muslim Brotherhood' or 'affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood.'

Narrowing the analysis to the UK, it is arguable that there are three categories of individuals and organisations that can be referred to as Brotherhood. In decreasing degrees of intensity these are the pure Brothers, Brotherhood spinoffs and organisations and individuals influenced by the Brotherhood.

The Three Categories of the Muslim Brotherhood in the UK

The Pure Brothers

The first (and uncontested) tier of Brotherhood presence is represented by those members of various branches of the Muslim Brotherhood throughout the Middle East who over the last fifty years have established a presence in the UK. With varying timings and intensity members of the Egyptian, Iraqi, Syrian, Libyan, Tunisian, Palestinian and, to a lesser degree, other branches of the Muslim Brotherhood have settled predominantly in London but also in other areas of the country.

Many of them arrived in the UK as students, often scions of wealthy families who already belonged to the Brotherhood or at least had been exposed to its ideology. But many arrived as refugees, escaping waves of persecutions in their home countries. While many were low- and mid-ranking members, some were top leaders – tellingly, by the late 1990s the general secretaries of the Syrian, Iraqi and Tunisian branches of the Brotherhood were all living in London.[6] As Rachid Ghannouchi, head of the Tunisian al Nahda, said a few months after settling in London to escape persecution from Ben Ali's regime: 'We Islamists may have a lot of criticism of Western values, yet we are seeking refuge in such atheist countries because we appreciate the benefits of freedom and the value of democracy.'[7]

Depending on the circumstances, these clusters of exiles and students maintained more or less close relations with the mother groups in their respective countries of origin. Each national group established more or less extensive structures within the UK. Still today they raise funds, publish various publications, organise events, lobby and carry out a whole range of activities aimed principally at supporting the cause of their brethren in their respective motherlands. In some cases they recruit both within and, at times, outside their national and ethnic communities.

Only some of these activities are carried out openly. For example, membership, leadership structures, recruitment processes and finances are carefully guarded secrets.[8] The level of secrecy is even greater when it concerns the activities inside the UK of the Palestinian branch of the Brotherhood, Hamas. Hamas has long established a presence in the country, largely devoted to collecting funds through the activities of a handful of charities linked to the larger Brotherhood

[6] James Brandon and Raffaello Pantucci, "UK Islamists and the Arab Uprisings," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 13 (2012), p. 19.
[7] Youssef M. Ibrahim, "Conversations: Sheik Rashid el-Ghanoushi; An Islamic Fundamentalist Abroad Talks Freely of Limits on Freedom," *The New York Times*, 9 January 1994.
[8] Despite claims to the contrary by many Brotherhood members, there are several indications that internal dynamics (recruitment, leadership selection, internal mobility) in Europe follow formalised procedures identical to those of the branches based in the Middle East.

milieu and various businesses.[9] But since its activities are monitored by authorities (its military wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, has been designated a terrorist organisation by the Home Secretary since March 2001), the group operates with the utmost secrecy.[10]

Each of the Brotherhood clusters operates mostly independently from one another, and rivalries and disagreements are not uncommon. Yet, united by a common worldview, they have long established connections and coordination among them. Some of the first attempts to create some kind of formal coordination among themselves and with other Islamists throughout Europe date back to the 1970s, when Salem Azzam established the Islamic Council of Europe in Belgravia.[11] The London-based Muslim Welfare House (MWH), established in 1970 by Libyan Brotherhood member Ashur Shamis, also played a key role in connecting Brotherhood members from various countries.[12]

The MWH was later run by Kamal Helbawy, a prominent and charismatic member of the Egyptian Brotherhood who settled in the UK in 1994 to create an official media centre for the Brotherhood and became the organisation's official spokesperson in the West.[13] While the divide among nationalities is still important, a web of personal and organisational connections has made the members of the various 'Brotherhoods' operating in London part of an unstructured yet cohesive milieu.

Most recently, given the dramatic developments in their home country and their active role, the Egyptian Brotherhood milieu operating in London has understandably been under the spotlight. It is a heterogeneous cluster that includes some of the group's most senior members and some junior activists. Among the former, particularly noteworthy is Ibrahim Mounir, who has long occupied one of the top positions in the International Organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood. Mounir, who has lived in the UK for almost forty years, is also the general supervisor of *Risalat al Ikhwan*, the Brotherhood's official magazine published in London.

Similarly senior is Gomaa Amin, who has been considered the de facto new *murshid* of the organisation after the incarceration in Egypt of the last Supreme Guide, Mohammed Badie, and most other senior members who could have potentially replaced him. Amin found himself in this position because he had flown to London for medical treatment a few days before the coup – therefore avoiding the fate of his peers.[14] Less senior but, given his younger age, arguably more active is Mohammed Soudan, the former Foreign Relations Secretary of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) and a long-time Brotherhood member. Soudan was able to fly out of Cairo in August 2013, a few days after Egyptian authorities began arresting Brotherhood members, thanks to a

[9] Interview with British government official (London), June 2014; for the centrality of London in Hamas' fundraising, see also an extensive report from Fatah News: http://www.alfatehnews.com/arabic/?action=detail&id=62034.
[10] Home Office, "Proscribed Terrorist Organisations," HM Government, 30 October 2015, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/301777/ProscribedOrganisationsApril14.pdf.
[11] John Lawton, "Muslims in Europe: The Presence," *Saudi Aramco World* (January/February 1979), p. 3–8.
[12] Innes Bowen, *Medina in Birmingham, Najaf in Brent: Inside British Islam* (London: Hurst, 2014), p. 103.
[13] Kamal Helbawy (London), interview with author, 2009; Kamal Helbawy (Cairo), interview with author, 2011. It should be noted that Helbawy recently left the Brotherhood.
[14] Abdullah el Haddad (London), interview with author, May 2014; Robert Mendick and Edward Malnick, "Muslim Brotherhood leader Gomaa Amin is in Hiding in London," *Telegraph*, 24 August 2013.

personal connection at Cairo airport and a five-year visa to the UK he had attained though his position in the FJP.[15]

These and other senior officials are supported by a small cadre of younger Brotherhood members, many of whom are students in various British universities. Initially the official spokesperson for the Brotherhood in the UK was Mona el Qazzaz, whose brother Khaled was a close adviser of former Egyptian president Mohammed Morsi. Over the last few months she seems to have been replaced by Abdullah el Haddad, a young, British-born and London-based engineering student who comes from one of the Brotherhood's most prominent families.[16] His father Essam is a very prominent Alexandria-based businessman and member of the Brotherhood's Guidance Bureau who occupied the position of presidential assistant responsible for foreign relations and international cooperation in Morsi's government.[17] Essam el Haddad spent significant time in the UK, obtaining his PhD from Birmingham University's Medical School and co-founding Islamic Relief Worldwide, one of the largest Islamic charities in the West.[18] Abdullah's brother Gehad is also a prominent Brotherhood member and served as the group's media spokesman in Egypt.[19]

Since the fall of Morsi's regime this cluster has been engaged in a series of activities to support the Brotherhood's struggle in Egypt. Abdullah el Haddad and the younger members run a media campaign that spans traditional media, where they seek to provide their viewpoint to the many British and international media outlets based in London, and online social media. Some of these activities are run from the Cricklewood offices of World Media Service (WMS), a company incorporated by Brotherhood member Mohammed Ghanem in 1993 that publishes the pro-Brotherhood website ikhwanpress.org.

The activists also organise several events to protest the current Egyptian regime but attendance seems to be extremely limited. Although the events are not billed as Brotherhood events but are held under more comprehensive banners (for example as organised by Egyptians for Democracy UK, an umbrella group headed by Maha Azzam that includes non-Brotherhood opponents of the current regime), participation is very small.[20] Pictures show just a few dozen people in attendance at events organised during the last few months.

A couple of events attended by the author in May 2014 in London were similarly small. Most participants appear to be Egyptian Brothers and, interestingly, there is very limited participation from members of other branches of the Brotherhood or other British-based Islamists. The milieu also engages in lobbying, seeking to make their case with members of Parliament, government officials, diplomats and any other potential interlocutors. They have also organised several events in Parliament sponsored by various MPs but attended by very few people.

Arguably the most prominent effort the Egyptian Brotherhood cluster is engaged in is the legal challenge against the current Egyptian regime. The cluster has retained a large network of prominent law firms and human rights experts led by London firm ITN Solicitors and can count

[15] Mohammed Soudan (London), interview with author, May 2014.
[16] Abdullah el Haddad (London), interview with author, May 2014.
[17] Ahram Online, "Morsi Spokesman Reveals Names of Presidential Assistants, Advisers," 27 August 2012.
[18] For Dr. el Haddad's bio, see http://www.mir-initiative.com/updates/rome/speakers/essam-el-haddad/.
[19] BBC News, "Brotherhood Spokesman Gehad al-Haddad Held in Egypt," 17 September 2013.
[20] The informal coalition of London-based activists who work with the Brotherhood include diverse elements spanning from respected scholar Maha Azzam of Chatham House to former Gamma Islamiya senior member Usama Rushdi.

on the support of former Director of Public Prosecutions Lord Ken Macdonald.[21] Its legal team has filed a case against the Egyptian regime at the International Criminal Court (rejected in May 2014) and is reportedly pursuing several cases in various venues as part of a comprehensive legal strategy.[22]

The London cluster is an important cog in the machine that the Egyptian Brotherhood has been trying to recreate outside the country – arguably inferior only to Doha and Istanbul in size and importance. London-based Brotherhood activists regularly communicate with their counterparts throughout the world and inside Egypt, despite the logistical difficulties and security challenges in doing so. They also participate in meetings that are often held in Turkey, Qatar or other countries in order to coordinate activities and discuss strategies with other members of the Egyptian Brotherhood, other Islamist groups and friendly governments.[23]

Brotherhood Spinoffs

Historically, Brotherhood members who arrived in the UK took two opposing approaches to their sojourn. Some remained extremely insular, focused exclusively on supporting the struggle in their home countries and not involving themselves in activities and debates related to Islam in Britain. Others, while never forgetting the vicissitudes of their countries of origin and the region, eventually decided to focus a significant part of their energies on British Muslim communities and British society more broadly.[24]

The second tier of what can be termed 'Muslim Brotherhood' comprises organisations established by individuals with strong personal ties to the Brotherhood but which operate completely independently from any Brotherhood structure and usually transcend the national divides that characterise the first tier. Of the many organisations that fit this description, arguably the most important is the MAB. Established in 1997, it had among its founders and main activists prominent individuals with deep links to the Egyptian (Kamal Helbawy), Iraqi (Anas al Tikriti and Omar el Hamdoun), Palestinian (Azzam Tamimi and Mohammed Sawalha), Libyan (El Amin Belhaj) and Tunisian (Said Ferjani) branches of the Brotherhood.

MAB's main aim was (and still is) to influence the debate about Islam (and Islamism) within British Muslim communities, policy circles and the wider British public. Its efforts are accompanied by those of the countless entities the relatively few but ever enterprising activists of the British Brotherhood milieu have established over the last twenty years: think tanks and mobilisation platforms (like the British Muslim Initiative and the Cordoba Foundation), charities, television channels and many other forms of political activism. These initiatives spread an Islamist take, often refined and contextualised to the British environment, on global and domestic issues. Each serves a specific purpose and acts independently from the others, even

[21] Irvine Thanvi Solicitors, "Press statement on behalf of the Muslim Brotherhood," 2 April 2014, http://www.itnsolicitors.com/itn/files/1e/1edc17d9-7a5a-4d52-963c-398e5566c8a8.pdf.
[22] Agence France Presse, "ICC Rejects Muslim Brotherhood call to Probe Egypt," 1 May 2014; Mohammed Soudan (London), interview with author, May 2014.
[23] Soudan, interview.
[24] For a more extensive analysis of Muslim Brotherhood networks and legacy organisations in the West, see Lorenzo Vidino, *The New Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). For the chapter on the UK, see p. 114–46.

though connections among them are clear, as they often share leadership, membership, initiatives and sources of funding.

By the mid-2000s the Brotherhood milieu headed by MAB had achieved remarkable successes. Inside the Muslim community its activists could count on widespread popularity and support, easily mobilising thousands of people for their events (and, in the case of the Stop the War Coalition, much larger numbers in conjunction with other non-Muslim groups). They had also built some solid ties with prominent politicians (mostly on the left) and the media, which often treated them as legitimate interlocutors and representatives of the Muslim community (in light also of the significant influence they held inside the Muslim Council of Britain). In some cases their organisations received government funding under the Prevent scheme, as various voices within the British counterterrorism community deemed them valid allies against jihadist radicalisation.

Yet, over the last few years, these successes seem to have been undone. The unravelling appears to have significantly accelerated with the Arab Spring due to a combination of factors. Arguably the first is that many of the milieu's key activists left the UK as soon as successful revolutions toppled the regimes in their countries of origin. Charismatic leaders like Helbawy and Belhaj immediately returned to Egypt and Libya respectively. Ghannouchi, Ferjani and several other Tunisian activists also left to occupy key positions in al Nahda.[25] Such voids have proven difficult to fill. As a participant at a 2013 Cordoba Foundation conference argued: 'Prior to the Arab Spring, there was a political apparatus in the UK regulating and coordinating, albeit quite loosely, the work of the Islamic movements but that is no longer the case although the need of such an apparatus now is more than ever.'[26]

An arguably even deeper negative repercussion of the return to their home countries of many by the British Brotherhood's milieu's leaders is the impact that this move had on younger British activists. While never denying their understandable passion for developments in their countries of origin, since the early 1990s British-based Brotherhood members had expressed a keen interest in British Islam, often portraying themselves as the de facto representatives of British Muslims.

To see that many of these leaders left Britain for good at the first opportunity and those who stayed devoted all their energies to events abroad made many younger activists, most of whom are British-born and seek to prioritise developments in Britain, feel somewhat betrayed. This led many of them, whether they were directly involved in MAB and other organisations of the milieu or simply sympathisers, to feel disenchanted with both the milieu's leaders and its ideology.[27] It can be argued that because of these developments the Brothers' popularity in British Islamist quarters and the larger British Muslim community has decreased significantly.

Another issue that had long afflicted the British Brotherhood milieu has metastasised over the last few years. Composed by many larger-than-life personalities with sometimes conflicting views and interests, the British Brotherhood appears to have become extremely fragmented. Some of the fissures are simply driven by personality conflicts. Others have ideological roots. For example, many members strongly disapprove of the decision of Anas al Tikriti and several

[25] Brandon and Pantucci, "UK Islamists and the Arab Uprisings."
[26] Cordoba Foundation, "Arab and Muslim National Security: Debating the Iranian Dimension," *Intellectual Revisions*, Series Briefing Paper 2, 11 January 2013,
[27] Omar el Hamdoun (MAB president, London), interview with author, May 2014.

other activists to transform MAB's tactical cooperation with left wing forces into a permanent partnership (which took the form of the Respect Party).[28]

Another issue that has created major divisions is Iran (and, by extension, Shiism). Some British Brothers have traditionally had friendly interactions with the Iranian government and expressed the wish to bridge the Sunni–Shia divide. But most recently, driven by the increased sectarian tensions throughout the Middle East, many British Brothers have expressed a strong animosity towards Iran and Shiism.

The proceedings of a conference held by the Cordoba Foundation in January 2013 displayed a strong disdain, bordering on sectarian hatred, for Iran and Shiism: 'It is in the very nature of Shiite thought to reject any other identity', the paper argued. 'It thrives on disagreements and differences with other sects and is constantly in search for a political being.'[29] Another section stated: 'We are not worried about Iran's cultural project because it is irrational and holds a belief system too absurd to attract anyone. It is the demographic expansion, such as the one in Syria, that we should be worried about.'

These defections and splits occurred at a time when the Cameron government, intensifying a philosophical revision process that had started already under Gordon Brown, decided to de facto close the door to the Brotherhood milieu, limiting its contacts with it and making sure it did not receive Prevent funding. All these factors led to a significant decline of the legitimacy, influence and mobilising capabilities of the British Brotherhood milieu. Its events attract numbers that are greatly inferior to those of the 1990s or mid-2000s. Few in the media or government still treat its leaders as viable spokespeople for British Muslims. And internal fragmentation has caused what appears to be a lack of strategic focus.

Brotherhood-influenced

The term 'Muslim Brotherhood' could also be loosely used to identify various organisations that have only limited structural ties to the movement but trace their history to it and adopt an ideology and political and mobilisation *modi operandi* similar to it. Various organisations that include individuals with deep ties to the Muslim Brotherhood among their founders, who have since dwelled in ideological milieus that are very close to the movement, belong to this third layer of what can be termed the Muslim Brotherhood. Examples of such organisations are FOSIS (Federation of Student Islamic Societies) and prominent charities like Islamic Relief.

At the same time, the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood is also easy to detect in the numerically much larger cluster of British-based organisations that trace their origins to the Jamaat-e-Islami, the Brotherhood's sister movement in South Asia.[30] Not only is the ideology at the core of the two movements extremely similar (a fact determined partially by the frequent interactions between the key thinkers of the two movements since the 1940s), but JeI's British

[28] Interview with unnamed London-based Islamists, May 2014.
[29] Cordoba Foundation, "Arab and Muslim National Security."
[30] See HM Government, Department for Communities and Local Government, "The Pakistani Community in England: Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities," The Change Institute, March 2009, http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919132719/http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1170952.pdf.

spinoffs (UK Islamic Mission, Young Muslims UK and Islamic Forum Europe) have long been influenced by British-based members of the Muslim Brotherhood.[31]

This dynamic was particularly evident in the early 1990s when young, mostly British-born, activists of the JeI milieu were star-struck by charismatic, experienced, knowledgeable and Arabic-speaking Brotherhood leaders like Ghannouchi and Helbawy. The Brotherhood used to run study circles for young South Asian Islamists and sometimes conducted recruitment drives inside JeI milieus. The numerically small Brotherhood milieu managed to amplify its footprint through the grassroots work undertaken by the significantly larger numbers of the JeI activists.

These dynamics have changed significantly over the last few years. The JeI milieu seems to have broadly split into two macro-currents. The first, arguably larger and still in charge of the leadership of the many institutions the network has created over the last decades, still adopts what could be described as the 'traditional' or 'unreformed' JeI and Brotherhood ideology. Over the last few years, particularly after the pressure that the government and the media have put on it, it has shown some sign of change in a more liberal direction, publicly abandoning some of its most controversial stances (such as boycotting Holocaust Remembrance Day). Yet many of its characteristics remain extremely problematic, starting with the extremist tones of many of the speakers its organisations regularly feature.

Parts of the JeIi milieu seem to have adopted and refined some of the entryist tactics typical of the Brotherhood, applying them to local politics (as in the case of Tower Hamlets) or education (as, apparently, in the so-called 'Trojan horse' plot in Birmingham). Irrespective of these dynamics, it seems that this more conservative JeI milieu operates in complete independence from members of the Brotherhood milieu. While some personal and, occasionally, organisational contacts are still strong, the JeI milieu appears to be subjected to the Brotherhood's influence only from an ideological perspective, and not operationally.

The break from the Brotherhood is even more marked for those, generally younger, members of the JeI milieu who have been progressively moving away from JeI and sometimes from Islamism in general. Organisations like the Islamic Society of Britain and charismatic thought leaders like Dilwar Hussain seem to have embarked on a journey that is leading them to challenge many of the cornerstones of traditional Islamism, and in the process construct a more progressive political, social and religious Islamic discourse more adapted to the British environment. In doing so they have in more or less open ways parted ways not only with the traditional JeI milieu but, even more, with the Brotherhood milieu that so much influenced them during their formative years.

It seems apparent that, with notable exceptions, the 'Islamic discourse' in the UK has evolved dramatically over the last ten years. A section of it remains extremely conservative and has been increasingly influenced by various strands of Salafism. But most of it has become more mature and less receptive to catchy but shallow slogans such as 'Islam is the solution'. It is shaped largely by second- (if not third-) generation individuals who are interested in global events but also equally care about social matters inside the UK. And for them challenging Islamist dogmas and personalities is no longer a taboo. It is clear that such a sophisticated debate (which is

[31] Innes Bowen, *Medina in Birmingham, Najaf in Brent: Inside British Islam* (London: Hurst, 2014).

arguably unique in Europe) pays little attention to the mostly antiquated, simplistic and foreign-affairs-centred views of most British Brotherhood leaders.[32]

The Goals of the Muslim Brotherhood

As seen, with an inevitable degree of simplification, the goal of the Brotherhood can be described as the establishment of an Islamic state through 'Islamisation from below', a slow process that would culminate in the creation of a purely Islamic system of government as the natural consequence of the Islamisation of the majority of the population. Yet, as soon as it established a presence in the West, a pragmatic movement like the Brotherhood immediately understood that the goal of turning Western countries into Islamic states is little more than a lofty ambition.[33]

So what are the goals of the Brotherhood in the UK and, more broadly, the West? It seems apparent that the goals of the first layer, the pure Brothers, are very much related to its members' countries of origin. For example, the Egyptian Brotherhood members who are currently in London are very much focused on supporting the Brotherhood's cause in Egypt and see the UK as a convenient safe haven and base of operation from where to mount their political, diplomatic, media and legal battle.

The aims of the second layer, the long-time British-based Brothers, and the third, the Brotherhood-influenced milieus, are arguably different and can be summed up as follows:

- To spread their religious and political views to British Muslim communities. Western countries are seen by the Brothers as a sort of Islamic tabula rasa, a virgin territory where the socio-religious structures and limits of the Muslim world do not exist and where the Brothers can implement their *dawa* freely, overcoming their competition with their superior mobilisation skills and funds.
- To become official or de facto representatives of British Muslim communities in the eyes of the government and the media. Such a position would allow them to exert a degree of influence significantly higher than what a politically savvy yet extremely small movement could otherwise obtain.
- To support domestic and international Islamist causes. The Brothers aim at using their positions of influence to advocate for various Islamist causes both with local Muslim communities and British policy-makers and public. It is not uncommon for the Brothers to do so by formulating their positions through substantially different frames with their

[32] It is noteworthy that some of the new leaders of MAB, like its British-raised current president Omar el Hamdoun, fully understand these dynamics. Omar el Hamdoun (London), interview with author, May 2014.

[33] It should nonetheless be noted that occasionally the ambition of turning the West into Islamic states through *dawa* is raised by various Brotherhood leaders. In 2004, for example, Egyptian Brotherhood *murshid* Mohammed Akef declared his "complete faith that Islam will invade Europe and America, because Islam has logic and a mission." He added, "Europeans and the Americans will come into the bosom of Islam out of conviction." Al Qaradawi has repeatedly expressed the same view. In a 1995 speech at an Islamic conference in Toledo, Ohio, he stated: "We will conquer Europe, we will conquer America, not through the sword but through dawa." And in a *fatwa* posted on Islamonline.net in 2002 he reiterated this: "Islam will return to Europe as a conqueror and victor, after being expelled from it twice. I maintain that the conquest this time will not be by the sword but by preaching and ideology."

two target audiences (openly Islamist-inspired when speaking to the former, based on the concepts of democracy, human rights and social justice when speaking to the latter).

As said, the first two layers of what has been termed as Brotherhood comprise only a few hundred activists and a relatively larger number of sympathisers. They directly control only a dozen or so mosques throughout the UK. Yet, thanks to a combination of ideological flexibility, unrelenting activism, large funding and poor organisation of competing trends, the Brotherhood networks have in the past shown an enormous ability to monopolise the Islamic discourse.

The Brotherhood has made its interpretation of Islam the most readily available, and put its ideological stamp on most Islam-related issues, be they strictly religious or more properly political. Some of its concepts and frames have become adopted, almost subconsciously, by a large number of British Muslims who have no affiliation or contact with the Brotherhood.

Moreover, even the organisational decline should not be seen as permanent, as history has shown the Brotherhood's ability to resurge from times of crisis. The movement still possesses a relatively sophisticated structure inside the country, including a financial infrastructure (charities, businesses) the exact extent of which is difficult to determine. Moreover, the group also has a cunning ability to compensate for its small numbers by working through a sophisticated web of proxies and transversal alliances.